A

SERMON

Preached before the

KING

MARCH 13. 166$\frac{6}{7}$.

BY

Edward Stillingfleet, B. D. Chaplain in Ordinary to his Majesty.

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T. R. Fairfam S857B

PROVERBS 14. 9.

Fools make a mock at Sin.

WHEN *God* by his infinite Wisdom had contrived, and by a power and goodness, as infinite as his Wisdom, had perfected the creation of the visible world, there seemed to be nothing wanting to the glory of it, but a creature endued with reason and understanding, which might comprehend the design of his wisdom, enjoy the benefits of his goodness, and employ it self in the celebration of his power. The Beings purely intellectuall were too highly raised by their own order and creation, to be the *Lords* of this inferiour world: and those whose natures could reach no higher than the objects of sense, were not

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capable of diſcovering the glorious perfections of the great Creator: and therefore could not be the fit *Inſtruments* of his praiſe and ſervice. But a conjunction of both theſe together was thought neceſſary to make up ſuch a ſort of beings, which might at once command this lower world, and be the ſervants of him who made it. Not as though this great fabrick of the world were meerly raiſed for man to pleaſe his fancy in the contemplation of it, or to exerciſe his dominion over the creatures deſigned for his uſe and ſervice; but that by frequent reflections on the author of his being, and the effects of his power and goodneſs, he might be brought to the greateſt love and admiration of him. So that the moſt naturall part of *Religion* lyes in the gratefull acknowledgments we owe to that excellent and ſupreme Being, who hath ſhewed ſo particular a kindneſs to man in the creation and Government of the world. Which was ſo great and unexpreſsible, that ſome have thought, it was not ſo much pride and affectation of a greater height, as envy at the felicity and power of mankind, which was the occaſion of the fall of the *Apoſtate Spirits*. But whether or no the ſtate of man were occaſion enough for the

envy

envy of the *Spirits* above; we are ſure the kindneſs of Heaven was ſo great in it, as could not but lay an indiſpenſable obligation on all mankind to perpetuall gratitude and obedience. For it is as eaſie to ſuppoſe, that affronts and injuries are the moſt ſuitable returns for the moſt obliging favours; that the firſt duty of a *Child* ſhould be to deſtroy his Parents; that to be thankful for kindneſſes received, were to commit the unpardonable ſin; as that man ſhould receive his being and all the bleſsings which attend it from *God*, and not be bound to the moſt univerſall obedience to him.

And as the reflection on the author of his being, leads him to the acknowledgement of his duty towards *God*, ſo the conſideration of the deſign of it, will more eaſily acquaint him with the nature of that duty which is expected from him. Had man been deſigned only to act a ſhort part here in the world, all that had been required of him, had been only to expreſs his thankfulneſs to *God* for his being, and the comforts of it; the uſing all means for the due preſervation of himſelf; the doing nothing beneath the dignity of humane nature, nothing injurious to thoſe who were of the ſame nature with himſelf; but

since he is designed for greater and nobler ends, and his present state, is but a state of tryall, in order to future happiness and misery; the reason of good and evill is not to be taken meerly from his present, but from the respect, which things have to that eternall state he is designed for. From whence it follows, that the differences of good and evill are rooted in the nature of our beings, and are the necessary consequents of our relation to *God*, and each other, and our expectations of a future life. And therefore according to these measures, the estimation of men in the world hath been while they did preserve any veneration for *God* or *themselves*. Wisdom and folly was not measured so much by the subtilty and curiosity of mens speculations, by the finess of their thoughts, or the depth of their designs, as by their endeavours to uphold the dignity of mankind; by their piety and devotion towards *God*; by their sobriety and due Government of their actions; by the equality and justice, the charity and kindness of their dealings to one another. Wisdom was but another name for goodness, and folly for sin: then it was a mans glory to be religious; and to be profane and vitious, was to be base and mean: then there were no *Gods*

worſhipped becauſe they were bad, nor any men diſgraced becauſe they were good. Then there were no *Temples* erected to the meaneſt paſsions of humane nature, nor men became *Idolaters* to their own infirmities. Then to be betrayed into ſin, was accounted weakneſs; to contrive it, diſhonour and baſeneſs; to juſtifie and defend it, infamy and reproach; to make a mock at it, a mark of the higheſt folly and incorrigibleneſs. So the Wiſe Man in the words of the Text aſſures us, that they are *Fools*, and thoſe of the higheſt rank and degree of folly, *who make a mock at ſin.*

It is well for us in the Age we live in, that we have the judgement of former ages to appeal to, and of thoſe perſons in them whoſe reputation for wiſdom is yet unqueſtionable. For otherwiſe we might be born down by that ſpightfull enemy to all vertue and goodneſs, the impudence of ſuch, who it is hard to ſay whether they ſhew it more in committing ſin, or in defending it. Men whoſe manners are ſo bad, that ſcarce any thing can be imagined worſe, unleſs it be the wit they uſe to excuſe them with. Such who take the meaſure of mans perfections downwards, and the nearer they approach to beaſts, the more they think themſelves to act like men.

men. No wonder then, if among ſuch as theſe the differences of good and evil be laughed at, and no ſin be thought ſo unpardonable, as the thinking that there is any at all. Nay the utmoſt they will allow in the deſcription of Sin, is, that it is a thing that ſome live by declaiming againſt, and others cannot live without the practice of.

But is the *Chair* of *Scorners* at laſt proved the only chair of Infallibility? Muſt thoſe be the ſtandard of mankind, who ſeem to have little left of humane nature, but laughter and the ſhape of men? Do they think that we are all become ſuch fools to take ſcoffs for arguments, and raillery for demonſtrations? He knows nothing at all of goodneſs, that knows not that it is much more eaſie to laugh at it, than to practiſe it; and it were worth the while *to make a mock at ſin*, if the doing ſo would make nothing of it. But the nature of things does not vary with the humours of men; ſin becomes not at all the leſs dangerous becauſe men have ſo little Wit to think it ſo; nor *Religion* the leſs excellent and advantageous to the world, becauſe the greateſt enemies of that are ſo much to themſelves too, that they have learnt to deſpiſe it. But although that ſcorns to be defended by ſuch

weapons

weapons whereby her enemies assault her, (nothing more unbecoming the *Majesty* of *Religion*, than to make it self cheap, by making others laugh) yet if they can but obtain so much of themselves to attend with patience to what is serious, there may be yet a possibility of perswading them, that no *fools* are so great as those who laugh themselves into misery, and none so certainly do so, as those *who make a mock at sin.*

But if our authority be too mean and contemptible to be relyed on, in a matter wherein they think us so much concern'd (and so I hope we are to prevent the ruine of mens souls) we dare with confidence appeal to the generall sense of mankind in the matter of our present debate. Let them name but any one person in all the monuments of former ages, to whom but the bare suspicion of Vice was not a diminution to an esteem that might otherwise have been great in the world. And if the bare suspicion would do so much among even the more rude and barbarous Nations, what would open and professed wickedness do among the more knowing and civill? Humane nature retains an abhorrency of sin, so far that it is impossible for men to have the same esteem of those who are given over

to all manner of wickedneſs, though otherwiſe of great ſharpneſs of Wit, and of ſuch whoſe naturall abilities may not exceed the other, but yet do govern their actions according to the ſtrict rules of *Religion* and *Vertue*. And the generall ſenſe of mankind cannot be by any thing better known, than by an univerſall conſent of men, as to the wayes whereby they expreſs their value and eſteem of others. What they all agree on as the beſt character of a perſon worthy to be loved and honoured, we may well think is the moſt agreeable to humane nature; and what is univerſally thought a diſparagement to the higheſt accompliſhments, ought to be looked on as the diſgrace and imperfection of it. Did ever any yet, though never ſo wicked and profane themſelvs, ſeriouſly commend another perſon for his rudeneſs and debaucheries? Was any man's luſt or intemperance ever reckoned among the Titles of his honour? Who ever yet raiſed *Trophies* to his vices, or thought to perpetuate his memory by the glory of them? Where was it ever known, that ſobriety and temperance, juſtice and charity were thought the marks of reproach and infamy? Who ever ſuffered in their reputation by being thought to be really good? Nay, it is ſo far

from

from it, that the moſt wicked perſons do inwardly eſteem them whether they will or no. By which we ſee, that even in this lapſed and degenerate condition of mankind, it is only goodneſs which gains true honour and eſteem, and nothing doth ſo effectually blaſt a growing reputation, as wickedneſs and vice.

But if it be thus with the generality of men, who were never yet thought to have too much partiality towards goodneſs, we may much more eaſily find it among thoſe, who have had a better ground for the reputation of their wiſdom, than the meer vogue of the people. He who was pronounced by the *Heathen Oracle*, to be the wiſeſt among the *Greeks*, was the perſon who brought down Philoſophy from the obſcure and uncertain ſpeculations of nature, and in all his diſcourſes recommended vertue as the trueſt wiſdom. And he among the *Iews*, whoſe *ſoul was as large as the ſand on the Sea ſhore, whoſe wiſdom outwent that of all the perſons of his own or future ages*, writes a Book on purpoſe to perſwade men, that there is no reall wiſdom, but to fear God and keep his commandments: that ſin is the greateſt folly, and the meaner apprehenſions men have of it, the more they are infatuated by the temptations to it. But as

1 King. 4. 29, 30, 31.

there are degrees of ſinning, ſo there are of folly in it. Some ſin with a bluſhing countenance, and a trembling conſcience; they ſin, but yet they are afraid to ſin: they ſin, but in the act of it they condemn themſelves for what they do; they ſin, but with confuſion in their faces, with horrour in their minds, and an earthquake in their conſciences: though the condition of ſuch perſons be dangerous, and their unquietneſs ſhews the greatneſs of their folly, yet becauſe theſe twitches of conſcience argue there are ſome quick touches left of the ſenſe of good and evil, their caſe is not deſperate, nor their condition incurable. But there are others who deſpiſe theſe as the reproach of the *School* of *Wickedneſs*, becauſe they are not yet attained to thoſe heights of impiety which they glory in: ſuch who have ſubdued their conſciences much eaſier than others do their ſins; who have almoſt worn out all the impreſſions of the *work of the Law written in their hearts*; who not only make a practice, but a boaſt of ſin, and defend it with as much greedineſs as they commit it; theſe are the men, whoſe folly is manifeſt to all men but themſelves; and ſurely ſince theſe are the men, whom *Solomon* in the words of the *Text* deſcribes,

(1.) By

(1.) By their character, as *Fools*, and,

(2.) By the inſtance of their folly, *in making a mock at ſin*; We may have not only the liberty to uſe, but to prove, that name of reproach to be due unto them; and (2.) To ſhew the reaſonableneſſe of faſtning it upon them, becauſe they *make a mock at ſin.*

But before I come more cloſely to purſue that, it will be neceſſary to conſider another ſenſe of theſe words cauſed by the ambiguity of the *Hebrew* Verb, which ſometimes ſignifies to deride and ſcorn, ſometimes to plead for, and excuſe a thing with all the arts of *Rhetorick* (thence the word for *Rhetorick* is derived from the Verb here uſed) according to which ſenſe, it notes all the plauſible pretences and ſubtle extenuations which wicked men uſe in defence of their evil actions. For as if men intended to make ſome recompence for the folly they betray in the acts of ſin by the wit they employ in the pleading for them, there is nothing they ſhew more induſtry and care in, than in endeavouring to baffle their own conſciences, and pleaſe themſelves in their folly, till death and eternall flames awaken them. That we may not therefore ſeem to beg all wicked men for *Fools*, till we have heard what they have to ſay for themſelves, we

ſhall firſt examine the reaſonableneſs of their faireſt Plea's for their evil actions, before we make good the particular impeachment of *folly* againſt them. There are three wayes eſpecially whereby they ſeek to juſtifie themſelves, by laying the blame of all their evil actions, either upon the fatall neceſſity of all events, the unavoidable frailty of humane nature, or the impoſsibility of keeping the Laws of Heaven. But that none of theſe will ſerve to excuſe them from the juſt imputation of *folly*, is our preſent buſineſs to diſcover.

1. *The fatall neceſsity of all humane actions.* Thoſe who upon any other terms are unwilling enough to own either *God* or *Providence*, yet if they can but make theſe ſerve their turn to juſtifie their ſins by, their quarrell againſt them then ceaſeth, as being much more willing that *God* ſhould bear the blame of their ſins, than themſelvs. But yet the very fears of a *Deity* ſuggeſt ſo many dreadfull thoughts of his *Majeſty*, *Juſtice*, and *Power*, that they are very well contented to have him wholly left out; and then to ſuppoſe Man to be a meer Engine, that is neceſſarily moved by ſuch a train and ſeries of cauſes, that there is no action how bad ſoever that is done by him, which it was any more poſsible for him not to have done, than for the

the fire not to burn when it pleaſes. If this be true, farewell all the differences of good and evil in mens actions; farewell all expectations of future rewards and puniſhments; *Religion* becomes but a meer name, and righteouſneſs but an art to live by. But it is with this, as it is with the other arguments they uſe againſt *Religion*; there is ſomething within, which checks and controlls them in what they ſay: and that inward remorſe of conſcience, which ſuch men ſometimes feel in their evil actions (when conſcience is forced to recoil by the foulneſs of them) doth effectually confute their own *hypotheſis*; and makes them not believe thoſe actions to be neceſſary, for which they ſuffer ſo much in themſelves becauſe they knew they did them freely. Or is it as fatall for man to believe himſelf free when he is not ſo, as it is for him to act when his choice is determined? but what *ſeries* of cauſes is there that doth ſo neceſſarily impoſe upon the common ſenſe of all mankind? It ſeems very ſtrange, that man ſhould have ſo little ſenſe of his own intereſt to be ſtill neceſſitated to the worſt of actions, and yet torment himſelf with the thoughts that he did them freely. Or is it only the *freedome of action*, and not *of choice*, that men have an experience of within

within themſelves? But ſurely, however men may ſubtilly diſpute of the difference between theſe two, no man would ever believe himſelf to be free in what he does, unleſs he firſt thought himſelf to be ſo, in what he determines? And if we ſuppoſe man to have as great a *freedom of choice* in all his evil actions (which is the liberty we are now ſpeaking of) as any perſons aſſert or contend for, we cannot ſuppoſe that he ſhould have a greater experience of it, than now he hath. So that either it is impoſsible for man to know when his choice is free; or if it may be known, the conſtant experience of all evil men in the world will teſtifie, that it is ſo now. Is it poſsible for the moſt intemperate perſon to believe, when the moſt pleaſing temptations to luſt or gluttony are preſented to him, that no conſiderations whatever could reſtrain his appetite, or keep him from the ſatisfaction of his brutiſh inclinations? Will not the ſudden, though groundleſs, apprehenſion of poyſon in the Cup, make the Drunkards heart to ake, and hand to tremble, and to let fall the ſuppoſed fatall mixture in the midſt of all his jollity and exceſs? How often have perſons who have deſigned the greateſt miſchief to the lives and fortunes of others,

others, when all opportunities have fallen out beyond their expectation for accompliſhing their ends, through ſome ſudden thoughts which have ſurprized them, almoſt in the very act, been diverted from their intended purpoſes? Did ever any yet imagine that the charms of beauty and allurements of luſt were ſo irreſiſtible, that if men knew before hand they ſhould ſurely dye in the embraces of an adulterous bed, they could not yet withſtand the temptations to it? If then ſome conſiderations, which are quite of another nature from all the objects which are preſented to him, may quite hinder the force and efficacy of them upon the mind of man (as we ſee in *Joſeph's* reſiſting the importunate Careſſes of his Miſtris) what reaſon can there be to imagine that man is a meer *machine* moved only as outward objects determine him? And if the conſiderations of preſent fear and danger may divert men from the practice of evil actions, ſhall not the far more weighty conſiderations of eternity have, at leaſt an equall, if not a far greater power and efficacy upon mens minds, to keep them from everlaſting miſery? Is an immortall ſoul and the eternal happineſs of it ſo mean a thing in our eſteem and value, that we will not deny our ſelves thoſe

ſenſuall pleaſures for the ſake of that, which we would renounce for ſome preſent danger? Are the flames of another world ſuch painted fires, that they deſerve only to be laughed at, and not ſeriouſly conſidered by us? Fond man! art thou only free to ruine and deſtroy thy ſelf? a ſtrange fatality indeed, when nothing but what is mean and triviall ſhall determine thy choice! when matters of the higheſt moment are therefore leſs regarded, becauſe they are ſuch. Haſt thou no other plea for thy ſelf, but that thy ſins were fatal? thou haſt no reaſon then to believe but that thy miſery ſhall be ſo too. But if thou owneſt a *God* and *Providence*, aſſure thy ſelf that juſtice and righteouſneſs are not meer *Titles* of *his Honour*, but the reall properties of his nature. And he who hath appointed the rewards and puniſhments of the great day, will then call the ſinner to account, not only for all his other ſins, but for offering to lay the imputation of them upon himſelf. For if the greateſt abhorrency of mens evil wayes, the rigour of his Laws, the ſeverity of his judgements, the exactneſs of his juſtice, the greateſt care uſed to reclaim men from their ſins, and the higheſt aſſurance, that he is not the cauſe of their ruine, may be any vindication of the holineſs of

God

God now, and his juſtice in the life to come; we have the greateſt reaſon to lay the blame of all our evil actions upon our ſelves, as to attribute the glory of all our good unto himſelf alone.

2. *The frailty of humane nature*: thoſe who find themſelves to be free enough to do their ſouls miſchief, and yet continue ſtill in the doing of it, find nothing more ready to plead for themſelves, than the unhappineſs of mans compoſition, and the degenerate ſtate of the world. If *God* had deſigned (they are ready to ſay) that man ſhould lead a life free from ſin, why did he confine the ſoul of man to a body ſo apt to taint and pollute it? But who art thou O man, that thus findeſt fault with thy Maker? Was not his kindneſs the greater, in not only giving thee a ſoul capable of enjoying himſelf, but ſuch an habitation for it here, which by the curioſity of its contrivance, the number and uſefulneſs of its parts, might be a perpetual and domeſtick teſtimony of the wiſdom of its *Maker*? Was not ſuch a conjunction of ſoul and body neceſſary for the exerciſe of that dominion which *God* deſigned man for, over the creatures endued only with ſenſe and motion? And if we ſuppoſe this life to be a ſtate of tryall in order to a better, (as in

all reaſon we ought to do) what can be imagined more proper to ſuch a ſtate, than to have the ſoul conſtantly employed in the government of thoſe ſenſuall inclinations which ariſe from the body? In the doing of which, the proper exerciſe of that vertue conſiſts, which is made the condition of future happineſs. Had it not been for ſuch a compoſition, the difference could never have been ſeen between good and bad men; *i. e.* between thoſe who maintain the Empire of reaſon, aſſiſted by the motives of *Religion*, over all the inferiour faculties, and ſuch who dethrone their ſouls and make them ſlaves to every luſt that will command them. And if men willingly ſubject themſelves to that which they were born to rule, they have none to blame but themſelves for it. Neither is it any excuſe at all, that this, through the degeneracy of mankind, is grown the common cuſtome of the world; unleſs that be in it ſelf ſo great a Tyrant, that there is no reſiſting the power of it. If *God* had commanded us to comply with all the cuſtoms of the world, and at the ſame time to be *ſober, righteous, and good*, we muſt have lived in another age than we live in, to have excuſed theſe two commands from a palpable contradiction. But inſtead of this, he hath fore-

forewarned us of the danger of being led aſide by the ſoft, and eaſie compliances of the world; and if we are ſenſible of our own infirmities, (as we have all reaſon to be) he hath offered us the aſſiſtance of his *Grace* & of that *Spirit* of his, *which is greater than the Spirit that is in the world.* 1 Joh. 4. 4. He hath promiſed us thoſe weapons whereby we may withſtand the *torrent* of wickedneſs in the world, with far greater ſucceſs than the old *Gauls* were wont to do the inundations of their countrey, whoſe cuſtome was to be drowned with their arms in their hands. But it will be the greater folly in us to be ſo, becauſe we have not only ſufficient means of reſiſtance, but we underſtand the danger before hand. If we once forſake the ſtrict rules of religion and goodneſs, and are ready to yield our ſelves to whatever hath got retainers enough to ſet up for a cuſtome, we may know where we begin, but we cannot where we ſhall make an end. For every freſh aſſault makes the breach wider, at which more enemies may come in ſtill; ſo that when we find our ſelves under their power, we are contented for our own eaſe to call them *Friends.* Which is the unhappy conſequence of too eaſie yielding at firſt, till at laſt the greateſt ſlavery to ſin be accounted but good humour, and a gentle compliance

with the faſhions of the world. So that when men are perſwaded, either through fear, or too great eaſineſs to diſuſe that ſtrict eye which they had before to their actions, it oft times falls out with them, as it did with the Souldier in the *Roman Hiſtory*, who blinded his eye ſo long in the time of the Civil Wars, that when he would have uſed it again, he could not. And when cuſtom hath by degrees taken away the ſenſe of ſin from their conſciences, they grow as hard as *Herodotus* tells us the heads of the old *Egyptians* were by the heat of the Sun, that nothing would ever enter them. If men will with *Nebuchadnezzar* herd with the beaſts of the field, no wonder if their reaſon departs from them, and by degrees they grow as ſavage as the company they keep. So powerfull a thing is cuſtome to debauch mankind, and ſo eaſily do the greateſt vices by degrees obtain admiſsion into the ſouls of men, under pretence of being retainers to the common *infirmities* of humane nature. Which is a *phraſe*, through the power of ſelf-flattery, and mens ignorance in the nature of morall actions, made to be of ſo large and comprehenſive a ſenſe that the moſt wilfull violations of the *Laws* of Heaven, and ſuch which the *Scripture* tells us do exclude from the *Kingdom* of it,

it, do find (rather than make) friends enough to ſhelter themſelves under the *protection* of them. But ſuch a *protection* it is, which is neither allowed in the *Court* of Heaven, nor will ever ſecure the ſouls of men without a hearty and ſincere repentance, from the *arreſt* of divine juſtice; which when it comes to call the world to an account of their actions will make no defalcations at all for the power of cuſtom, or common practice of the world.

3. *The impoſſibility of the command, or rather of obedience to it.* When neither of the former plea's will effect their deſign, but notwithſtanding the pretended *neceſſity of humane actions*, and the more than pretended *common practice of the world*, their conſciences ſtill fly in their faces and rebuke them ſharply for their ſins, then in a mighty rage and fury they charge *God* himſelf with *Tyranny* in laying impoſsible *Laws* upon the ſons of men. But if we either conſider the nature of the command, or the promiſes which accompany it, or the large experience of the world to the contrary, we ſhall eaſily diſcover that this pretence is altogether as unreaſonable as either of the foregoing. For what is it that *God* requires of men as the condition of their future happineſs which in its own nature is judged impoſsible?

poſsible? Is it for men to *live ſoberly, righteouſly*
Tit. 2. 12. *and godly in this world*? for that was the end of Chriſtian Religion to perſwade men to do ſo: but who thinks it impoſsible to avoid the occaſions of intemperance, not to defraud, or injure his neighbours, or to pay that reverence and ſincere devotion to *God* which we owe unto him? *Is it to do as we would be done by*? yet that hath been judged by ſtrangers to the *Chriſtian Religion* a moſt exact meaſure of humane converſation; Is it *to maintain an univerſall kindneſs and good will to men*? that indeed is the great excellency of our Religion, that it ſo ſtrictly requires it; but if this be impoſsible, farewell all *good nature* in the world; and I ſuppoſe few will own this charge, leſt theirs be ſuſpected. Is it *to be patient under ſufferings, moderate in our deſires, circumſpect in our actions, contented in all conditions*? yet theſe are things which thoſe have pretended to who never owned *Chriſtianity*, and therefore ſurely they never thought them impoſsible. Is it *to be charitable to the poor, compaſsionate to thoſe in miſery*? is it *to be frequent in prayer, to love God above all things, to forgive our enemies as we hope God will forgive us, to believe the Goſpel, and be ready to ſuffer for the ſake of Chriſt*? There are very few among us but will ſay they do all theſe things already,

dy, and therefore ſurely they do not think them impoſsible. The like anſwer I might give to all the other precepts of the *Goſpel* till we come to the *denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts*, and as to theſe too, if we charge men with them, they either deny their committing them, and then ſay they have kept the command; or if they confeſs it, they promiſe amendment for the future; but in neither reſpect can they be ſaid to think the command impoſsible. Thus we ſee their own mouths will condemn them when they charge *God* with laying impoſsible *Laws* on mankind. But then if we enquire further into the judgements of thoſe who it may be never concerned themſelves ſo much about the precepts of *Chriſtian Religion*, as to try whether they had any power to obſerve them or not; nay, if we yield them more (than, it may be, they are willing to enquire after, though they ought to do it) *viz.* that without the *aſsiſtance of divine grace*, they can never do it: yet ſuch is the unlimited nature of divine goodneſs and the exceeding riches of Gods Grace, that (knowing the weakneſs and degeneracy of humane nature when he gave theſe commands to men) he makes a large and free offer of aſsiſtance to all thoſe who are ſo ſenſible of their own infirmity as to beg it of him. And can men then ſay the command is impoſsible when he hath promiſed an aſsiſtance ſutable to the nature of the duty & the infirmities of men? If it be acknow-

ledged that ſome of the duties of *Chriſtianity* are very difficult to us now; let us conſider by what means he hath ſweetned the performance of them. Will not the propoſal of ſo excellent a reward, make us ſwallow ſome more than ordinary hardſhips that we might enjoy it? Hath he not made uſe of the moſt obliging motives to perſwade us to the practice of what he requires, by the infinite diſcovery of his own love, the death of his Son, and the promiſe of his Spirit? And what then is wanting, but only ſetting our ſelves to the ſerious obedience of them, to make his commands not only not impoſsible, but eaſie to us? But our grand fault is, we make impoſsibilities our ſelves, where we find none, and then we complain of them: we are firſt reſolved not to practiſe the commands, and then nothing more eaſie than to find fault with them: we firſt paſs ſentence, and then examine evidences; firſt condemn, and then enquire into the merits of the cauſe. Yet ſurely none of theſe things can be accounted impoſsible, which have been done by all thoſe who have been ſincere and hearty Chriſtians; and *God* forbid, we ſhould think all guilty of hypocriſie, who have profeſſed the *Chriſtian Religion* from the beginning of it to this day. Nay more than ſo, they have not only done them, but profeſſed to have that joy and ſatisfaction of mind in the doing of them, which they would not exchange for all the pleaſures

and

and delights of the world. These were the men, who not only were patient, but rejoyced in sufferings; who accounted it their honour and glory to endure any thing for the sake of so excellent a religion; who were so assured of a future happiness by it, that they valued Martyrdoms above Crowns and Scepters. But God be thanked, we may hope to come to Heaven on easier terms than these, or else many others might never come thither, besides those who think to make this a pretence for their sin, that now when with encouragement and honour we may practise our Religion, the commands of it are thought impossible by them. Thus we have made good the general charge here implyed against wicked men, in that they are called *Fools*, by examining the most plausible pretences they bring for themselves.

I now come to the particular impeachment of their folly, because *they make a mock at sin.* And that I shall prove especially by two things: 1. Because this argues *the highest degree of wickedness.* 2. Because it betrayes the *greatest weakness of judgement and want of consideration.*

1. Because it argues *the highest degree of wickedness.* If to sin be folly, to make a mock at it is little short of madness. It is such a height of impiety, that few but those who are of very profligate consciences can attain to, without a long custom in sinning. For conscience is at first modest, and starts

and boggles at the appearance of a great wickedneſs, till it be uſed to it & grown familiar with it. It is no ſuch eaſie matter for a man to get the maſtery of his conſcience; a great deal of force and violence muſt be uſed to ones ſelf before he does it. The natural impreſsions of good and evil, the fears of a *Deity*, and the apprehenſions of a future ſtate are ſuch curbs and checks in a ſinners way, that he muſt firſt ſin himſelf beyond all feeling of theſe, before he can attain to the *ſeat* of the *ſcorners*. And we may juſtly wonder how any ſhould ever come thither, when they muſt break through all that is ingenuous and modeſt, all that is vertuous and good, all that is tender and apprehenſive in humane nature, before they can arrive at it. They muſt firſt deny a *God*, and deſpiſe an immortal ſoul, they muſt conquer their own reaſon, and cancell the *Law written in their hearts*, they muſt hate all that is ſerious, and yet ſoberly believe themſelves to be no better *than the beaſts that periſh*, before men can come to make a *ſcoff at religion*, and *a mock at ſin*.

And who now could ever imagine that in a Nation profeſsing *Chriſtianity*, among a people whoſe *genius* enclines them to civility and religion, yea among thoſe who have the greateſt advantages of behaviour and education, and who are to give the *Laws* of *civility* to the reſt of the Nation, there ſhould any be found who ſhould deride religion, make ſport with their own profaneneſs

fanencſs, and make ſo light of nothing, as being damned? I come not here to accuſe any, and leaſt of all thoſe who ſhew ſo much regard of *religion* as to be preſent in the places devoted to ſacred purpoſes; but if there be any ſuch here, whoſe conſciences accuſe themſelves, for any degrees of ſo great impiety; I beſeech them by all that is dear and precious to them, by all that is ſacred and ſerious, by the *vows* of their *Baptiſm*, and their *participation* of the *holy Euchariſt*, by all the kindneſs of Heaven which they either enjoy or hope for, by the death and ſufferings of the *Son* of *God*, that they would now conſider how great folly and wickedneſs they betray in it, and what the dreadfull conſequence of it will be, if they do not timely repent of it. If it were a doubt (as I hope it is not among any here) whether the matters of *religion* be true or no, they are ſurely things which ought to be ſeriouſly thought and ſpoken of. It is certainly no jeſting matter to affront a *God* of infinite *Majeſty* and *power*, (and he judges every wilfull ſinner to do ſo) nor can any one in his wits think it a thing not to be regarded, whether he be eternally happy or miſerable. Methinks then among perſons of civility and honour, above all others, *Religion* might at leaſt be treated with the reſpect and reverence due to the concernments of it; that it be not made the ſport of entertainments, nor the common ſubject of *Plays* and *Comedies*. For is

there nothing to trifle with, but *God* and his *service*? Is wit grown so *schismatical & sacrilegious*, that it can please it self with nothing but *holy ground*? Are profaneſs & wit grown ſuch inſeparable companions, that none ſhall be allowed to pretend to the one, but ſuch as dare be highly guilty of the other? Far be it from thoſe who have but the name of *Chriſtians*, either to do theſe things themſelves, or to be pleaſed with them that do them: eſpecially in ſuch times as ours of late have been, when *God* hath uſed ſo many wayes to make us ſerious if any thing would ever do it. If men had only ſlighted *God* and *religion*, and *made a mock at ſin*, when they had grown wanton through the abundance of peace and plenty, and ſaw no ſeverities of *Gods juſtice* uſed upon ſuch who did it; yet the fault had been ſo great, as might have done enough to have interrupted their peace and deſtroyed that *plenty*, which made them out of the greatneſs of their pride and wantonneſs to kick againſt Heaven: but to do it in deſpight of all *Gods* judgements, to *laugh in his face when his rod is upon our backs*, when neither Peſtilence nor Fire can make us more afraid of him, exceedingly aggravates the impiety, and makes it more unpardonable. When like the old *Germans we dance among naked ſwords*, when men ſhall defie and reproach Heaven in the midſt of a Cities ruines, and over the Graves of thoſe whom the arrows of the *Almighty* have heaped together,

what

what can be thought of such, but that nothing will make them serious, but eternal misery? And are they so sure there is no such thing to be feared, that they never think of it, but when by their execrable oaths they call upon *God* to *damn them*, for fear he should not do it time enough for them? Thus while men abuse his patience, and provoke his justice, while they trample upon his kindness, and slight his severities, while they despise his Laws and mock at the breaches of them, what can be added more to their impiety? or what can be expected by such who are guilty of it, but that *God* should quickly discover their mighty folly by letting them see how much they have deceived themselves, since *God will not be mocked*, but *because of these things the wrath of God will most certainly come upon the children of disobedience.* Which leads to the second thing wherein this folly is seen. Gal. 6. 7. Eph. 5. 6.

2. Which is in *the weakness of judgement and want of consideration*, which this betrayes in men. *Folly* is the great unsteadiness of the mind in the thoughts of what is good and fitting to be done. It were happy for many in the world, if none should suffer in their reputation for want of wisdom, but such whom nature or some violent distemper have wholly deprived of the use of their reason and understandings: But wisdom does not lye in the rambling imaginations of mens minds (for *fools* may think of the same things which wise men practise.)

practiſe) but in a due conſideration and choice of things which are moſt agreeable to the end they deſign, ſuppoſing the end in the firſt place to be worthy a wiſe mans choice; for I cannot yet ſee why the end may not be choſen as well as the means, when there are many ſtand in competition for our choice, and men firſt deliberate, and then determine which is the fitteſt to be purſued. But when the actions of men diſcover, that either they underſtand or regard not the moſt excellent end of their beings, or do thoſe things which directly croſs and thwart their own deſigns, or elſe purſue thoſe which are mean and ignoble in themſelves, we need not any further evidence of their folly, than theſe things diſcover.

Now that thoſe who *make a mock at ſin* are guilty of all theſe, will appear; if we conſider whom they provoke by doing ſo, whom they moſt injure, and upon what reaſonable conſiderations they are moved to what they do.

1. *Whom they provoke by their making a mock at ſin*; Suppoſing that there is a *Governour* of the world, who hath eſtabliſhed *Laws* for us to be guided by, we may eaſily underſtand, whoſe honour and authority is reflected on, when the violations of his *Laws* are made nothing of. For ſurely if they had a juſt eſteem of his *power* and *Soveraignty*, they never durſt make ſo bold with him, as all thoſe do who not only commit ſin themſelves, but laugh

at

at the ſcrupuloſity of thoſe who dare not When *Dionyſius* changed *Apollos* Cloak, and took off the *Golden Beard* of *Æſculapius*, with thoſe ſolemn jeers of the unſuitableneſs of the one to the Son of a beardleſs Father; and the much greater conveniency of a cheaper garment to the other; it was a ſign he ſtood not much in awe of the ſeverity of their looks, nor had any dread at all of the greatneſs of their power. But although there be ſo infinite a diſproportion between the artificial *Deities* of the *Heathens*, and the *Majeſty* of him who made and governs the whole world; yet as little reverence to his power and authority is ſhewed by all ſuch who dare affront him with ſuch a mighty confidence, and bid the greateſt defiance to his *Laws* by ſcoffing at them. What is there, the *Soveraigns* and *Princes* of the earth do more juſtly reſent, and expreſs the higheſt indignation againſt, than to have their *Laws* deſpiſed, their perſons affronted, and their authority contemned? And can we then imagine, that a *God* of infinite *power* and *Majeſty*, the honour of whoſe *Laws* is as dear to him as his own is, ſhould ſit ſtill unconcerned, when ſo many indignities are continually offered them, and never take any notice at all of them? It is true, his patience is not to be meaſured by our fretfull and peeviſh natures, (and it is happy for us all that it is not) he knows the ſinner can never eſcape his power, and therefore bears the longer

with him: but yet his lenity is alwayes joyned with his wiſdom and juſtice, and the time is coming when patience it ſelf ſhall be no more. Is it not then the higheſt madneſs and folly to provoke one whoſe power is infinitely greater than our own is, and from the ſeverity of whoſe wrath we cannot ſecure our ſelves one minute of an hour? How knoweſt thou, O vain man, but that in the midſt of all thy mirth and jollity, while thou art boaſting of thy ſins, and thinkeſt thou canſt never fill up faſt enough the meaſure of thy iniquities, a ſudden fit of an *Apoplexy*, or the breaking of an *Apoſteme*, or any of the innumerable inſtruments of death, may diſpatch thee hence, and conſign thee into the hands of divine juſtice? And wherewithall then wilt thou be able to diſpute with *God*? Wilt thou then charge his Providence with folly, and his Laws with unreaſonableneſs? when his greatneſs ſhall affright thee, his *Majeſty* aſtoniſh thee, his *power* diſarm thee, and his juſtice proceed againſt thee: when notwithſtanding all thy *bravado's* here, thy own conſcience ſhall be not only thy accuſer and witneſs, but thy judge and executioner too: when it ſhall *revenge* it ſelf upon thee for all the rapes and violences thou haſt committed upon it here: when horror and confuſion ſhall be thy portion, and the unſpeakable anguiſh of a racked and tormented mind ſhall too late convince thee of thy folly in *making a mock* at

that

that which ſtings with an everlaſting venom. Art thou then reſolved to put all theſe things to the adventure, and live as ſecurely as if the *terrors* of the *Almighty* were but the dreams of men awake, or the fancies of weak and diſtempered brains? But I had rather believe that in the heat and fury of thy luſts thou wouldſt ſeem to others to think ſo, than thou either doeſt or canſt perſwade thy ſelf to ſuch unreaſonable folly. Is it not then far better to conſult the tranquillity of thy mind here, and the eternal happineſs of it hereafter, by a ſerious repentance and ſpeedy amendment of thy life, than to expoſe thy ſelf for the ſake of thy ſenſual pleaſures to the fury of that *God* whoſe juſtice is infinite, and power irreſiſtible? Shall not *the apprehenſion of his excellency make thee* now *afraid of him*? Never then *make* any *mock at ſin* more, unleſs thou art able *to contend with the Almighty*, or *to dwell with everlaſting burnings.*

2. The folly of it is ſeen in conſidering *whom the injury redounds to* by mens making themſelves ſo pleaſant with their ſins. Do they think by their rude attempts to dethrone the *Majeſty* of Heaven, or by ſtanding at the greateſt defiance, to make him willing to come to terms of compoſition with them? Do they hope to ſlip beyond the bounds of his power, by falling into nothing when they dye, or to ſue out *prohibitions* in the Court of Heaven, to hinder the effects of *Juſtice* there? Do they

deſign to out-wit infinite Wiſdom, or to find ſuch flaws in *Gods* government of the world, that he ſhall be contented to let them go unpuniſhed? All which imaginations are alike vain and fooliſh, and only ſhew how eaſily wickedneſs baffles the reaſon of mankind, and makes them rather hope or wiſh for the moſt impoſſible things, than believe they ſhall ever be puniſhed for their impieties. If the *Apoſtate Spirits* can by reaſon of their preſent reſtraint and expectation of future puniſhments be as pleaſant in beholding the *follies* of men as they are malicious to ſuggeſt them, it may be one of the greateſt diverſions of their miſery, to ſee how active and witty men are in contriving their own ruine. To ſee with what greedineſs they catch at every bait that is offered them, and when they are ſwallowing the moſt deadly *poyſon*, what arts they uſe to perſwade themſelves that it is a healthful potion. No doubt, nothing can more gratifie them than to ſee men ſport themſelves into their own deſtruction, and go down ſo pleaſantly to Hell: when eternal flames become the firſt awakeners, and then men begin to be wiſe, when it is too late to be ſo: when nothing but inſupportable torments can convince them that *God* was in earneſt with them, that he would not alwayes bear the affronts of evil men, and that thoſe who derided the miſeries of another life, ſhall have leiſure enough to repent their folly, when their repentance ſhall only increaſe

creaſe their ſorrow without hopes of pardon by it.

3. But if there were any preſent felicity, or any conſiderable advantage to be gained by this *mocking at ſin*, and undervaluing Religion, there would ſeem to be ſome kind of pretence, though nothing of true reaſon for it. Yet that which heightens this folly to the higheſt degree in the laſt place is, that there can be no imaginable conſideration thought on which might look like a *plauſible temptation* to it. The covetous man, when he hath defrauded his neighbour, and uſed all kinds of arts to compaſs an eſtate, hath the fulneſs of his baggs to anſwer for him; and whatever they may do in another world, he is ſure they will do much in this. The voluptuous man, hath the ſtrong propenſities of his nature, the force of temptation which lyes in the charms of beauty, to excuſe his unlawfull pleaſures by. The ambitious man, hath the greatneſs of his mind, the advantage of authority, the examples of thoſe who have been great before him, and the envy of thoſe who condemn him, to plead for the heights he aims at. But what is it which the perſon who deſpiſes Religion, and laughs at every thing that is ſerious, propoſes to himſelf as the reaſon of what he does? But alas! this were to ſuppoſe him to be much more ſerious than he is, if he did propound any thing to himſelf as the ground of his actions. But it may be

a great kindneſs to others, though none to himſelf; I cannot imagine any, unleſs it may be, to make them thankfull they are not arrived to that height of folly; or out of perfect good nature, leaſt they ſhould take him to be wiſer than he is. The *Pſalmiſts fool* deſpiſes him as much as he does Religion: for he only *ſaith it in his heart there is no God*; but this though he dares not think there is none, yet ſhews him not near ſo much outward reſpect & reverence as the other does. Even the *Atheiſt* himſelf thinks him a *Fool*, & the greateſt of all other, who believes a *God*, and yet affronts him and trifles with him. And although the *Atheiſt's Folly* be unaccountable, in reſiſting the cleareſt evidence of reaſon, yet ſo far he is to be commended for what he ſayes, that if there be ſuch a thing as *Religion* men ought to be ſerious in it. So that of all hands the *ſcoffer at Religion* is looked on as one forſaken of that little reaſon, which might ſerve to uphold a ſlender reputation of being above *the beaſts that periſh*: nay, therein his condition is worſe than theirs, that as they underſtand not *Religion*, they ſhall never be puniſhed for deſpiſing it: which ſuch a perſon can never ſecure himſelf from, conſidering the *power*, the *juſtice*, the *ſeverity* of that *God*, whom he hath ſo highly provoked. *God* grant, that the apprehenſion of this danger may make us ſo ſerious in the profeſsion and practice of our Religion, that we may not by ſlighting that, and

mocking

mocking at ſin, provoke him *to laugh at our calamities, and mock when our fear comes*; but that by beholding the ſincerity of our repentance, and the heartineſs of our devotion to him, he may *turn his anger away from us, and rejoyce over us to do us good.*

FINIS.